



The Oral Health of Children: A Portrait of the Nation



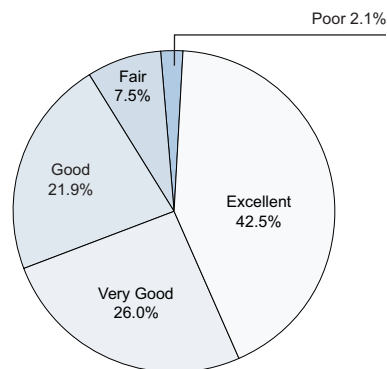
Condition of Children's Teeth

Parents were asked to rate the condition of their children's teeth as excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. Overall, the parents of 68.5 percent of children report that their children's teeth are in excellent or very good condition.

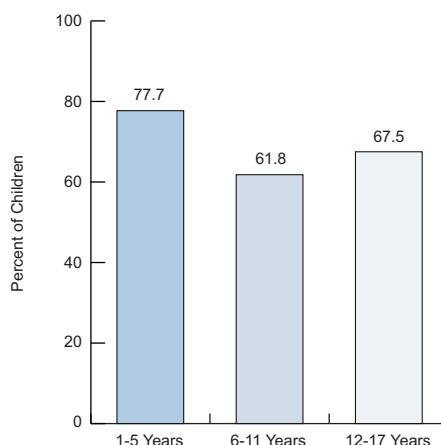
This proportion varies with children's age. The parents of 77.7 percent of 1- to 5-year-olds rate the condition of their children's teeth as excellent or very good, compared to 61.8 percent of children aged 6-11 and 67.5 percent of adolescents aged 12-17.

The condition of children's teeth varies by children's race and ethnicity as well. Just over three-quarters (76.4 percent) of White children have teeth that are in excellent or very good condition, as reported by their parents, as do 69.9 percent of multiracial children. The parents of Black and Hispanic children are less likely to report that their children's teeth are in excellent or very good condition: 61.1 percent of Black children and only 46.7 percent of Hispanic children have teeth that are in excellent or very good condition, as do 67.2 percent of children of other races.

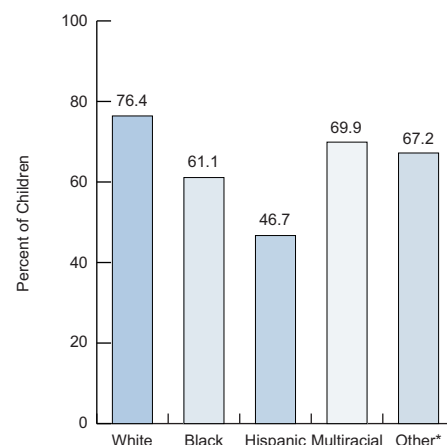
Condition of Children's Teeth



Percent of Children Whose Teeth Are in Excellent or Very Good Condition, by Age



Percent of Children Whose Teeth Are in Excellent or Very Good Condition, by Race and Ethnicity



*Includes Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native children.

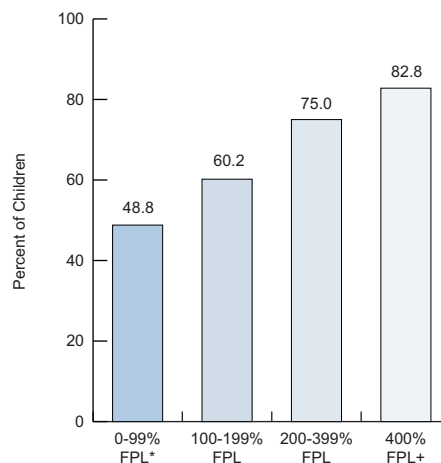




The condition of children's teeth also varies with family income. Of children with family incomes below the Federal poverty level (FPL), fewer than half (48.8 percent) were reported to have teeth that were in excellent or very good condition, compared to 60.2 percent of children with family incomes between 100 and 199 percent of the FPL, 75 percent of children with family incomes between 200 and 399 percent of the FPL, and 82.8 percent of children with family incomes of 400 percent or more of the FPL.

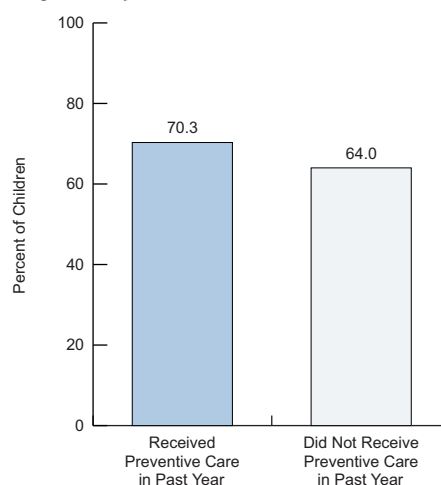
The use of preventive dental care also appears to be associated with the condition of children's teeth. Of children who went to a dentist at least once in the past year for preventive care, 70.3 percent had teeth in excellent or very good condition, compared to 64.0 percent of children who did not receive preventive care in the past year.

Percent of Children Whose Teeth Are in Excellent or Very Good Condition, by Family Income



*Federal poverty level, equal to \$18,400 for a family of four in 2003.

Percent of Children Whose Teeth Are in Excellent or Very Good Condition, by Receipt of Preventive Dental Care



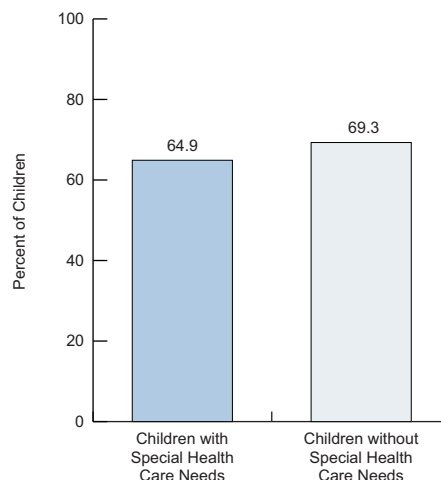


Children's dental health is closely related to their physical health. For example, 64.9 percent of children with special health care needs (defined as those who have a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally⁸), were reported to have teeth in excellent or very good condition, compared to 69.3 percent of children without special health care needs.

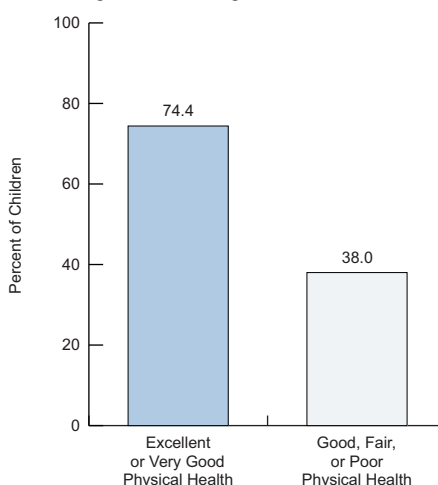
Of children whose overall physical health was described as excellent or very good, 74.4 percent had excellent or very good dental health. In contrast, of children whose overall health was rated as good, fair, or poor, only 38.0 percent had teeth in excellent or very good condition.

Children whose teeth are in excellent or very good condition are less likely than other children to miss more than 2 weeks of school due to illness or injury. Of children who missed 11 days or more of school in the past year, 56.6 percent were reported to have teeth in excellent or very good condition, compared to 65.4 percent of children who missed 10 days of school or fewer.

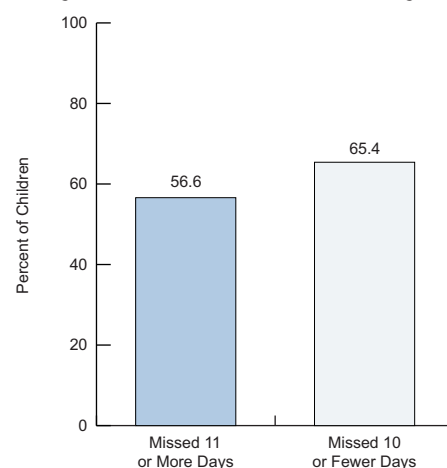
Percent of Children Whose Teeth Are in Excellent or Very Good Condition, by CSHCN Status



Percent of Children Whose Teeth Are in Excellent or Very Good Condition, by Overall Physical Health



Percent of Children Whose Teeth Are in Excellent or Very Good Condition, by Number of Missed School Days



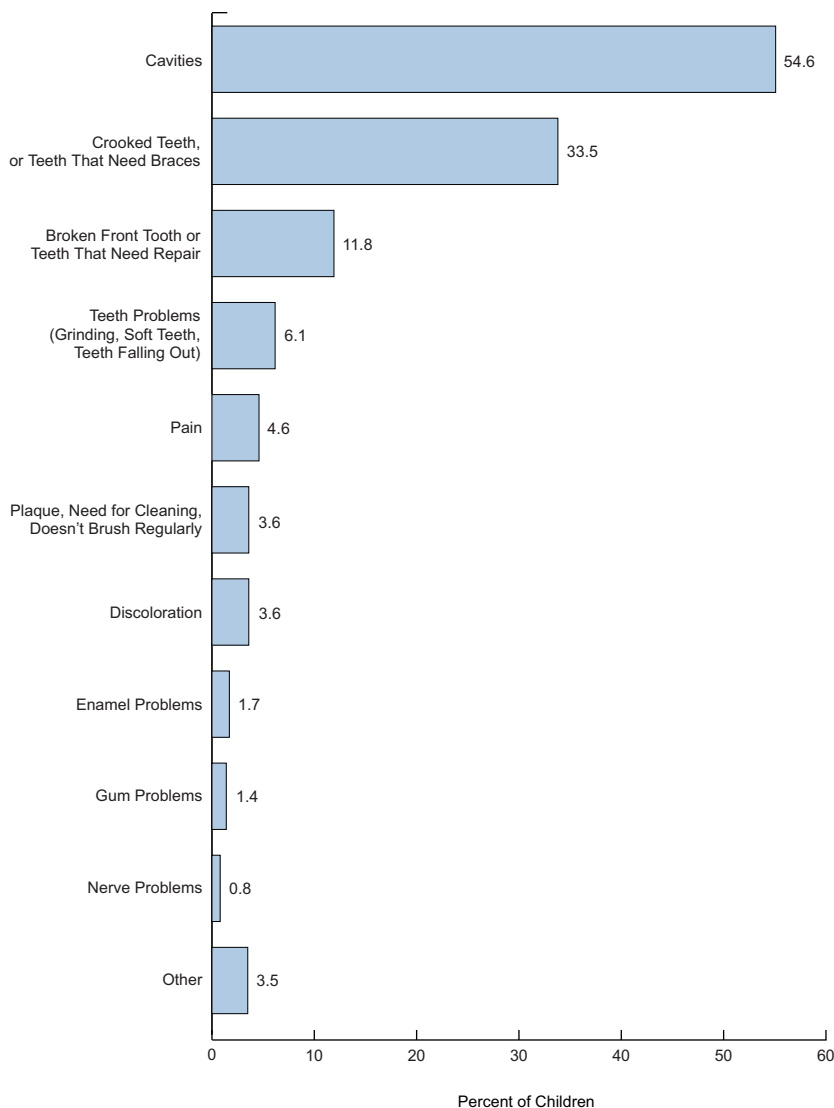


Problems with Teeth

When they reported that their children's teeth were in fair or poor condition, parents were asked what specific problems their children had with their teeth. More than half of children whose teeth are in fair or poor condition (54.6 percent) were reported to have cavities. Other commonly reported problems included crooked teeth, or teeth that need braces (33.5 percent); a broken front tooth or teeth that need repair (11.8 percent); teeth problems such as grinding, soft teeth, or teeth falling out (6.1 percent); and pain (4.6 percent).

All information in the survey about problems with teeth was reported by parents. Parents were allowed to name more than one problem with their children's teeth.

Problems with Teeth Among Children with Teeth in Fair or Poor Condition





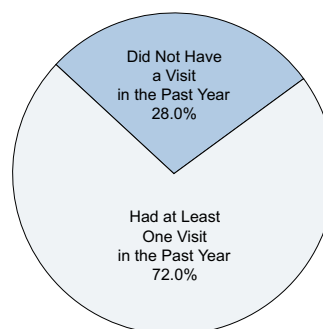
Use of Preventive Dental Care

Dental caries, or cavities, is the most common chronic disease among children in the United States.³ Because of the importance of early identification of children at risk for caries, and the potential benefit of early intervention in young children's oral health, it is recommended that all children have a dental visit by their first birthday.

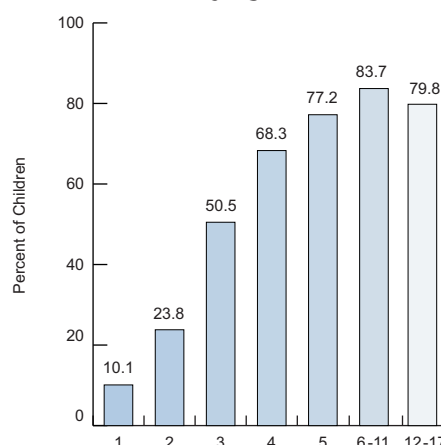
The traditional recommendation for preventive care thereafter is that children visit the dentist every 6 months for a checkup, although it is now recognized that such a schedule should be adjusted by the dentist based on each individual child's needs and susceptibility to disease.^{5,6,9} However, many children, particularly young children, receive care that does not even meet the traditional standard. Overall, parents of 72.0 percent of children aged 1 or older reported that their children had received at least one preventive dental visit in the past year. This rate was highest among children aged 6 to 11; of these children, 83.7 percent visited a dentist at least once for preventive care. Among adolescents aged 12-17, 79.8 percent received preventive dental care in the past year.

The use of preventive dental care among younger children is much less common. Among preschool children (aged 1 to 5), the proportion who have seen a dentist for preventive care rises with age, from 10.1 percent of 1-year-olds to 77.2 percent of

Receipt of Preventive Dental Care



Percent of Children Receiving Preventive Dental Care in Past Year, by Age





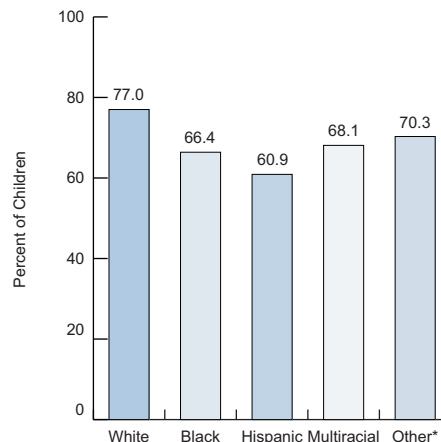
5-year-olds. Not until age 3 are even half of children reported to have had a preventive dental visit in the past year.

The likelihood of receiving annual preventive dental care appears to vary by demographic factors such as race and ethnicity and family income. Among White children, 77.0 percent received at least one preventive dental visit in the past year, as did 68.1 percent of multiracial children and 66.4 percent of Black children. The lowest rate of preventive dental care was seen in Hispanic children, of whom 60.9 percent received a visit. Among children of other races, 70.3 percent saw a dentist for preventive care in the past year.

Children in low-income families are less likely to receive preventive dental care than children with higher family incomes. Among children with family incomes below the Federal poverty level (FPL), 58.1 percent saw a dentist for preventive care in the past year, compared with 65.8 percent of children with family incomes between 100 and 199 percent of the FPL, 77.0 percent of children with family incomes between 200 and 399 percent of FPL, and 82.4 percent of children with family incomes of 400 percent of FPL or more.

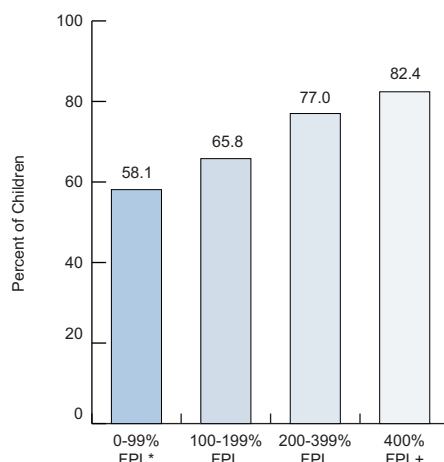
Children with special health care needs are more likely to receive preventive dental care than children without special health care needs (78.4 versus 70.6 percent.)

Percent of Children Receiving Preventive Dental Care in Past Year, by Race and Ethnicity



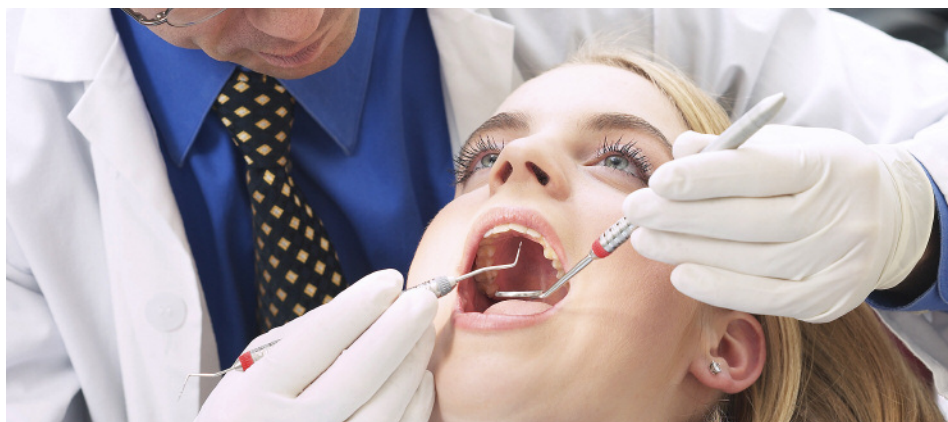
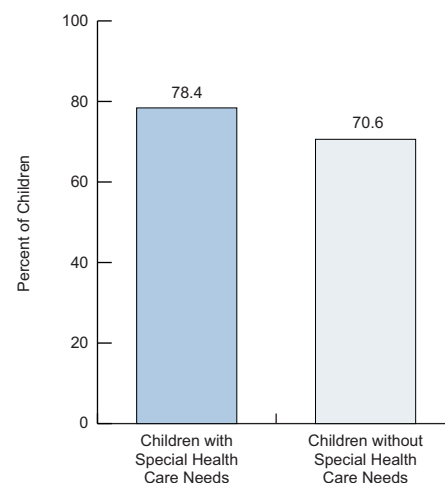
*Includes Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native children.

Percent of Children Receiving Preventive Dental Care in Past Year, by Family Income



*Federal poverty level, equal to \$18,400 for a family of four in 2003.

Percent of Children Receiving Preventive Dental Care in Past Year, by CSHCN Status



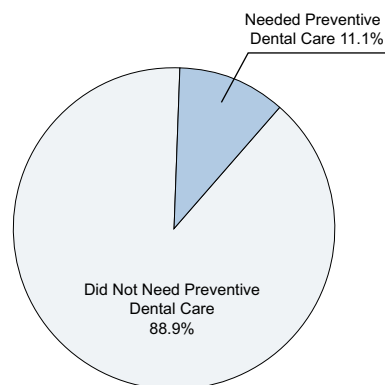


Need for Preventive Care

Although most professionals agree on the traditional recommendation that all children receive semi-annual preventive dental care with the child's first visit occurring before the child's first birthday, it appears that some parents are not aware of this recommendation. Parents of children who did not receive preventive dental care within the past year were asked if their children had needed preventive care during this time period. Overall, the parents of only 11.1 percent of children who did not receive dental care reported that their children had needed this care.

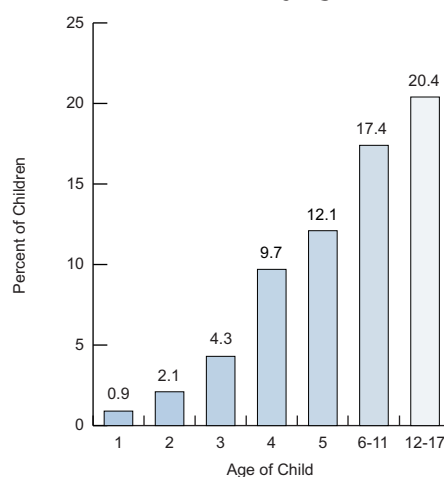
Again, parents' perception of the need for preventive dental care rises with their children's age. Of children who did not receive a preventive dental visit, parents of 20.4 percent of adolescents aged 12-17 and 17.4 percent of children aged 6-11 reported that their children had needed preventive dental care. However, parents of lower proportions of children aged 5 and under—ranging from 12.1 percent of 5-year-olds to less than 1 percent of 1-year-olds—reported a need for preventive dental care.

Reported Need for Preventive Dental Care in the Past Year*



*Among children who did not receive a preventive visit in the past year.

Percent of Children Reported to Have Needed Preventive Dental Care in Past Year, by Age



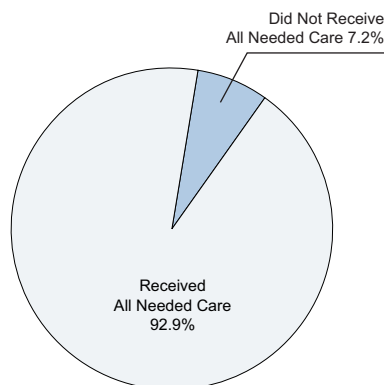


Receipt of All Needed Preventive Dental Care

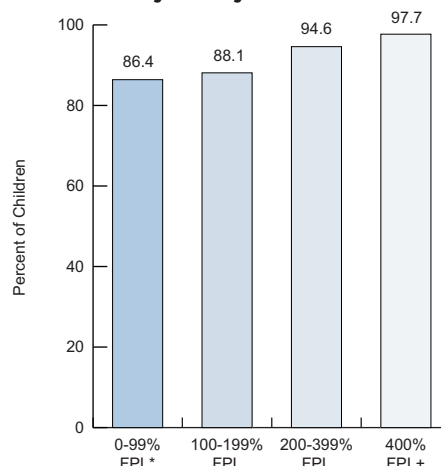
Parents were asked whether their children had received all of the preventive dental services they felt they needed. Those who said "no" had children who had either received no preventive dental care (although their parents felt they needed it) or had seen a dentist in the past year (but the parent felt that the child did not receive all the care he or she needed).

Overall, parents of the vast majority of children (92.9 percent) reported that their children received all the preventive dental care they needed in the past year. This rate is relatively consistent across children's age groups, although it does rise with family income. Of children with family incomes below 100 percent of the Federal poverty level (FPL), 86.4 percent received all the preventive dental care they needed, according to their parents, compared to 88.1 percent of children with family incomes between 100 and 199 percent of FPL, 94.6 percent of children with family incomes between 200 and 399 percent of FPL, and 97.7 percent of children with family incomes of 400 percent of poverty or more.

Receipt of All Needed Preventive Dental Care



Percent of Children Receiving All Needed Preventive Dental Care, by Family Income



*Federal poverty level, equal to \$18,400 for a family of four in 2003.





Reasons for Not Receiving Needed Dental Care

Parents whose children did not receive all the preventive care they needed were asked why their children had not received all the dental care they needed. The most commonly reported reasons were financial: the child had no insurance to cover the services (30.9 percent) or the services cost too much (29.3 percent).

Other commonly reported reasons were the inability to get an appointment (16.2 percent), a problem with the health plan (10.9 percent), and the inability to find a dentist who takes the child's insurance (7.2 percent). Parents could give more than one reason for their children not receiving needed dental care.

Reasons for Not Receiving Needed Dental Care

